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August 27, 2013

Congressman Derek Kilmer
1429 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Kilmer,

You will soon have an opportunity to vote on important legislation for our local forests and communities. In September the U.S. House of Representatives is expected to vote on H.R. 1526, known as the "Restoring Healthy Forests for Healthy Communities Act". The bill renews the federal government's commitment to managing federal forests for the benefit of forest health and our rural, forested communities.

Federal timber harvest levels on the Olympic National Forest have dropped more than 90 percent over the past 30 years. During that time, our communities have suffered from higher unemployment and poverty. In fact, Grays Harbor County consistently has one of the worst unemployment rates in the state and Clallam County isn't far behind. In some areas of the peninsula, eligibility for children in the Free and Reduced Price Meals program has been as high as 70 percent. While we won't return to pre-Clinton Northwest Forest Plan harvest levels, restoring active forest management to a portion of the Olympic National Forest will help create jobs and increase economic activity.

The federal government's mismanagement of forestlands has not only been bad for our local economy, it has placed our schools and counties at very serious risk. Historically, 25 percent of the revenues generated from National Forests were shared with local counties and schools for education, roads and other critical services. When harvest levels dropped due to the spotted owl crisis, appeals, and environmental litigation, Congress created the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program to compensate for lost timber revenues. For most of the past decade, peninsula counties and schools received over \$6 million annually.

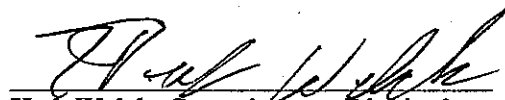
However, these levels have been reduced in recent years, as low as \$2.5 million in 2012, and may be permanently eliminated if an extension is not approved. To help protect local services in the short-term, the Restoring Healthy Forests for Healthy Communities Act provides an extension of SRS payments to allow counties to transition back to payments from sustainable forest management. As part of this long-term solution, reviving private sector employment in these forested communities will help generate additional revenue for counties and schools into the future.

Restoring responsible, sustainable management will also improve the health of our forests. Current harvest levels are only three percent of what grows naturally every year, and only thirteen percent of what dies every year. Our forests have become overgrown and more vulnerable to insects, disease and fire. Large portions of the forest are in desperate need of thinning. H.R. 1526 directs the Forest Service to implement responsible timber production on a portion of the agency's timber lands. The legislation also includes other new forest management authorities, such as Good Neighbor policy to take advantage of the expertise of our state Department of Natural Resources.

The Restoring Healthy Forests for Healthy Communities Act represents a long term solution that will provide a stable and sustainable revenue stream for rural schools and counties, create new jobs, strengthen rural economies, promote healthier forests, and decrease our reliance on foreign countries for timber and paper goods. We urge Rep. Kilmer to support the rural, forested communities in our district by supporting this legislation when it comes to the House Floor.

Thank you for your consideration and I urge you to support H.R. 1526.

Sincerely,


Herb Welch, Commissioner District 3